

Knowledge of Native Elders
Elders: Mike and Susie Angaiak
Summary by Carolyn Huizenga
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Before Mike Angaiak started talking about how he was raised in a small town, he asked Teresa to tell the class that he feels we are all of the same human race--the only difference is our inability to communicate with each other because of language differences.

Mike came from Tununak although he was born and raised in another village, Kayalivik, which no longer exists. It is located about 40 to 50 miles from Tununak or two hours by snowmachine. They used to go to another village, called Mer'aq, which also doesn't exist anymore. He went back there one time but couldn't even recognize it because the beach had been eroded away by the ocean.

When he first became aware of reality, there were no non-natives (gussaks) around. Teresa explained that the term "gussak" refers to any non-native, including Italian, German, Indian, etc. There were no house buildings or electricity like we have today. Their homes were made of driftwood with mud to cover it. The only light they had was a seal oil lamp in the middle of the house. In the village there was a bigger building, called qasgiq. There, the elder men and the young men gathered. They lived there most of the time and the elders taught the younger men how to survive in life and how to live. The boys slept on the floor on a platform of driftwood with no blankets to cover them. Since they didn't have modern fabric like we have today, they used to make parkas out of down from ducks or murrq. Sometimes they made them inside out and made kuspuks to cover up the material. In those days they didn't wash their parkas very often because they usually owned only one. They also didn't have the great variety of boots we have today. They made boots from seal skin. They wore grass insulation around their feet with lengths of braided grass wrapped around it to keep it secure. The mukluks were worn over this grass "sock". At first contact with the white man, they started using a five-gallon container for heating their homes. They cut a hole in the can and used another piece of metal for the chimney. They also used the big buckets that are used today for fish to make heaters with. When 55 gallon oil drums became available, they used to cut them in half and put them in their homes for heat.

The only time they used their heaters was in the morning (to make a hot drink) because of the scarcity of fuel. Since they didn't use the heaters most of the time the inside of their houses were very humid so they put a layer of grass down on the floor to absorb the moisture. When the grass became saturated with moisture, it froze, so they gathered up the grass with their bare hands. Then they gathered up new grass to spread on the floor. They always had muddy hands because of this but Mike said they didn't bother to wash them--it wasn't necessary. Since their homes were so cold they kept their fish inside, wrapped all

together in a bundle. First they aged them, then put them in a grass bag and put them in the middle of the house to freeze them. (Today they are kept in food caches.)

At mealtime, the women pried some fish from the big bundle. The girl or girls of the family were responsible for feeding the males of the family, regardless of how many males there were. She piled each man's personal wooden bowl, made of driftwood, into her arms and took them over to the men's building. The girls had to sit on driftwood chairs, away from the men, and wait until the men finished their meals. She then collected their plates and took them home. The wooden chairs are called naciitet. He also doesn't recall people getting sick with colds all the time like they do today.

Mike's father died when Mike was very young so he didn't have a father to learn how to make the things necessary for survival ~~from~~. He used to walk around the community and observe other people teaching their kids. That's how he learned. They commonly used the bow and arrow to hunt land animals and birds like ptarmigan. He observed what kind of tools the other boys and men used and what kind of things they made. He knew it was up to him to try to make things so he tried over and over again until he was satisfied. He advised the class to never give up.

Susie Angaiak, Yup'ik name Uliggaq, began talking. She couldn't tell us how old she is because she doesn't know exactly when she was born. She and Mike have 11 children; ten boys and one girl. A lot of them have been to college and their daughter is a teacher in their village. There is a difference between where her husband was born, which is an interior village far away from the coast, and where she was born, which was on Nelson Island. She notices differences in the environments she and Mike were raised in as well as how they were raised. Her area was drier so they didn't need to use grass on their floors. They also had no electricity but did have candles and kerosene lamps. The lamps seemed very bright to them but the electricity we have today makes her feel as if we have 24 hours of daylight. There were no boats and the qayaq was their only means of transportation. They wore only mukluks made of seal skin also. They sometimes treated them to waterproof them because they hunted along the coast and along the rivers. They had shorter ones for inside the house and longer ones for outside purposes. In the winter they used grass insulation too but in the summer they went barefoot. They saved their salmon skins, which are very thick when dry, and made fall-time mukluks because they're more waterproof. Mike said they're very warm even in the winter. They also dried trout skins to make wet-land gloves from. They took the scales off the skins before they dried them.

She learned how to make things by observing her mother. Although she did get instruction from her mother, she realized that she might need to know how to do things herself so she tried making things on her own. Her mother was a role model for her. Sometimes when Susie gets stuck and doesn't know how to make something, she thinks back to how her mother did it. From those memories of her younger days growing up with her mother, she figures out how to do things. She used to make inside-out duck

skin pullover parkas but doesn't see the need to make them anymore because of all the modern parkas available today. The ducks they used for parkas were Eider ducks.

Tereas said that when they cook water fowl they slice them in half and pull off the skin. They then cook them until they're rare, until they're bleeding in the middle--more taste!

Mike corrected what Susie said about there being no boats in the old days. He said there were boats and they were made of bearded seals (ugrooks). The bearded seal is one of the biggest seals caught on the coast. Not every man owned a boat but a number of men shared one boat. All the men had to go out into the wilderness all the time in order to survive. The legs and hands were very important. Today it is different--the kids don't need to use their muscles to survive. He worries about the younger people and wonders how they will survive if they lose the outboard motors and other modern technology they have today. He remembers tough times growing up and not being satisfied after eating. His parents decided how much food and water the children should have. In the old days the younger people showed respect to their parents and elders.

There was no direct teaching but they learned through observation. People are different and have different learning behaviors. Some aren't attentive and can't comprehend. He was taught that when they didn't listen and follow what they were told, they were bound to do the wrong things. Their value systems are so set that everyone knows what is expected of them. The elders like to teach the younger people because they love them and would like to teach them how to live in an acceptable manner so they can live together peacefully. He wishes he could teach young people how to make the right choices in life to keep from making mistakes.

He told a story about hands. Each hand has five fingers for a total of ten. The purpose of having ten fingers is so a person can use them to the maximum if he or she wants to. That's the choice. If a person loses one finger, he has to compensate for that loss. The hands can be used to be very productive or not so productive. They were told to take care of their hands because they are so important. Their hands are a tool to make things for survival. The same applies to the legs and other body parts.